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ABSTRACT

Two worldwide challenges seem very important for the future of adult education. The first is the challenge that comes from the worldwide tension between ideas of personal freedom and variety on the one hand and social equity and unity on the other. Adult education is challenged worldwide to help people to make a responsible use of their freedom. This idea of the necessary and responsible use of personal freedom can be demonstrated and promoted by organizing adult education according to a combination of an open library model with a voluntary cooperative system. The second worldwide challenge for adult education is the tension between progressive rationalization and professional specialization on the one hand and a growing need for whole persons with a well-balanced identity on the other. This second challenge also leads to two organizational models--the "Specialization-Plus" model (specialized instruction plus reflection on its limitations) and the "Interdisciplinary Project" model (compensatory multiple-challenge learning projects)--and their combination. (YLB)

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G. Dohmen

World wide challenges for adult education

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I know that in the US a speaker is supposed to start with a little joke or story - let me try it with a little story about the nightmare-dream of an adult educator:

An adult educator came up to St. Peter and asked for entrance into heaven, especially into heaven's special department for good educators.
He argued: "I have been very successfull in my educational work, almost doubled the number of courses and the number of certifactes in my adult education institution in the last 10 years. Under my leadership a new 5 million dollar building was built, our budget increased by 10 % on the average every year. I got some very important people into my board; at our last christmas-reception I could welcome 1 Senator and 2 Congressmen..."
St. Peter interrupted him: "And what was the meaning of all these activities? Which life-perspectives did your clientele develop? How did their thinking and behaving change when you worked with them? Whom did you stimulate to reflect the values of his or her life? What were your moral challenges? Which of the main problems of your lousy world did you really help to solve? What of all your efficiency do you think will finally count - seen from our heavenly point of view?"

The poor adult educator began to sweat - and suddenly he woke up bathed in perspiration but glad that it had only been a dream and that he still had a chance to think about St. Peter's questions and to reconsider and rearrange his work under the perspectives of this dream.

Well, what is the message of this little story?
Adult educators need to reflect the overall priorities and the values of their work from time to time; they need philosophical perspectives and theoretical visions which beware them of becoming content with doing what they ever did or with doing always better

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what perhaps will always become less important. We must get a critical wareness
- that we do not enough thinking about our final aims and
- that our unreflected activities may not count - even if we do them with full engagement and success.

If we have no meaningful perspectives it does not help us to take courageous decisions and effective actions. It can even be dangerous if those who have no critical awareness of the meaning of their doing are diligent, self-confident and effective. If we do not know what we finally want in our short life-span - how can we know what others should want, especially those we try to support in their learning processes?
We need dreams which confront us with critical questions for principles, meanings, values - sometimes even nightmare-dreams.

It is my argument in this context that adult educators are faced with so important, meaningful world-wide challenges today that they cannot afford just to pragmatically stick to their daily routine work.

Perhaps you do think now that this approach is typic European, typic "Abendland", occidental irrationalism.

If I may generalize for a moment, I would say: You here in the US seem to be so optimistic, so rational, so dynamic, so young and self-confident and so pragmatic that you don't ponder so much on theoretical problems and perspectives. You seem rather to prefer a pragmatical trial- and-error-scheme with sober empirical evaluation - and you seem to be happy with it.Whereas European adult educators - perhaps especially in West-Germany under the heavy burden of a long and after all not very successfull history - seem to have a more critic, doubtfull, pondering and often pessimistic attitude - pessimistic f.i. towards the expectation that a remarkable mental or moral progress of humanity could be promoted just by more effective educational methods and technologies.

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We have learned from our history how difficult it is to improve human thinking or human character - especially if we regard the whole person with cognitive, emotional and practical abilities, needs, habits. And we therefore have a tendency not so easily to engage ourselves anymore in activities if we don't have a convincing theoretical perspective for them.

European adult educators may need a little more of your pragmatism, dynamic efficiency and optimism. And American adult educators may perhaps sometimes need a little more of principal critical reflections.

Maybe a mixture of both pecularities would be good. Perhaps we should try together to find a compromise - f.i. by looking at some main overall challenges and at some practical models to efficiently answer them in the field of adult education.

And that is what I will try to do now.

Adult education has always had the task to help people to better understand and better master political, social, cultural, technical, economic changes and challenges in order to survive as free responsible human persons within all these changes and challenges.

Of course there are always many different challenges in different social and regional areas which need our attention. But I think there are also some worldwide challenges which seem to have an overall historical importance.

From my contacts and experiences with adult education in different countries and continents - on both sides of the iron curtain as well as in developed and underdeveloped countries - and of course also from very personal points of view I pick out 2 of these worldwide challenges which seem to me very important for our future:

1. The challenge which comes from the worldwide tension between ideas of personal freedom and variety on the one hand and social equity and unity on the other hand, and

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2. the challenge which comes from the tension between progressive rationalisation and professional specialisation on the one hand and a growing need for whole persons with a well-balanced identity on the other hand.

Let us first look at the tension between personal freedom and social equity and unity:

If we regard the situation in different countries in America or Europe, Africa or Asia we can see almost everywhere that some individuals or groups use their freedom to get always richer and more privileged at the expense of others who are not strong, clever, lucky unscrupulous enough or just did not have the necessary entrance chances to be successfull in a competitive society.

We all know that this can lead to a situation of heavy social injusti which then can cause revolutionary riots and movements. The result is often a military or socialist dictatorship - mostly proclaimed in the name of social justice, racial or class equity and national unity Maybe the US is one of the very few countries of this world where this is no actual danger. But under a worldwide perspective the relation between freedom and despotism can almost everywhere get a dialectic one which means that one extreme can easily turn to the opposite. Looking for a historical example is not difficult for a German:
We had a terrible example for such a turn-over in recent German history: We had a rather liberal democracy in Germany from 1919-33, the so-called Weimar Republic - but we had not learned to responsibly use this new freedom. So we had many political parties and politicians who fought against each other for more power, influence, privileges - while millions of poor unemployed people lived in deep distress. This situation finally caused the call for a strong man who should violently establish social solidarity and national unity. Such a situation made it possible that an able demagogue like Hitler finally won elections, got to power and within 4 years brought economic prosperity, labor, more social equity and national unity back to the people. But with all this economic social progress

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people gradually lost their personal freedom. While the power and the unity of the nation became more and more impressive the restrictions of personal freedom became heavier and heavier. And at the end you know we had lost both - our freedom as well as our national unity.

From this historical experience many of us first of all realized that nothing is more important than personal freedom. If you have once lived as an outlaw in panel camps or concentration camps the priorities of your values get quite clear: You understand why personal freedom is the condition Nr. 1 for human dignity.

But from historical experiences like this we could also learn that freedom is something that has to be treated carefully and that it gets endangered if it can not be properly combined with a highly developed sensitiveness for social justice. Nothing endangers freedom more than the selfish misuse of it.

What has all this to do with adult education?

I think we have to take this dialectic tension between freedom and social responsibility as an essential challenge also for adult education, a challenge which forces us to develop educational strategies and methods which can support and promote freedom and variety in a way which does <u>not</u> give arguments and sympathy to those who destroy freedom in the name of social justice and unity.

So if we look from this point of view for a convincing pattern of adult education we can find that it is not enough just to do the opposite of what adult educators must do in autocratic socialist systems. That means: it is not enough to give to everybody an unrestricted freedom to do what he or she wants - the problem is to convincingly combine the promotion of personal freedom and variety with the promotion of social responsibility and solidarity. This more complex approach is neccessary because it is obvious that also coercive authoritarian education often gets its chance and pretended justification from a growing indignation and resistance against disorder and injustice as results of a morally unbalanced use of

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personal freedom.

The call for a rigorous strait-jacket education always got its loudest support from the disappointment about a laissez-faire-education.
In other words: It is a worldwide challenge for adult education to help people to make a responsible use of their freedom that means that they not just try to satisfy personal egotism but regard the common weal, the general welfare including the poor, underprivileged fellowcitizen. This is not just a matter of charity but also of social structure.

I think this is a general perspective which corresponds to our European humanistic traditions and which could also find the agreement of many American adult educators.

What are the consequences for adult education?
Adults normally have already passed a formal education, they have already assimilated quite a lot of life-experiences, they are already more or less sozialized, have already developed cognitive structures, opinions, views. Adults therefore must be treated differently than school-children that means: they can and shall have the freedom to decide themselves about the goals, contents, methods, times and places of their learning processes - even if they may need advice and help. If there is a field in education where freedom of choice is a workable principle then it is adult education.

And the first organizational consequence I draw from this principle is this:
Adult education should not so much be organized according to the model of schools or colleges but more according to the model of libraries.

What is the difference between these 2 models?
If I go to <u>school</u> I normally get into a learning process which is directed by a teacher, determined by a curriculum and a time-table

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etc.: I have to fit in to a more or less fixed pattern.

This might even be true for the rather liberal schoolsystem in the USA but it is certainly true for the normal worldwide type of schools outside of the US.

If I go to a library I normally can choose and decide what sort of book or information I want to get and nobody forces me to follow a systematic course in order to finally get the information I am looking for. In a library I can immediately choose just the information units which most directly concentrate on the topic, problem, content which motivates me to improve my knowledge and awareness.
And this is the important point: I have the freedom of choice, it is my decision what I take out of a library-type information resource system. It is up to me how to arrange the order, time, combination in which I use the different information units which are available. That is why the library model seems to be more adequate than the school model for the free, self-directed independant life-long learning of adults.

From this general perspective, this library view for the organization of continuing education, we can derive all the necessary consequences:

1. We need an open flexible modular system of information units for the self-directed learning of adults.
2. We need local continuing education centers organized more like libraries than like schools.
3. We should not have large classes confronted to a teacher but individuals and small groups of self directed learners.
4. The experts working in this field of adult education are not longer expected to be primarily teachers but tutors, advisors, facilitators, animateurs, educational brokers and managers who assist self-directed learning activities and additionaly arrange or support discussions and communication opportunities.

All these consequences seem to be adequate to the principle of personal freedom.

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But as we need an education which also promotes a socially responsible use of freedom we have to care for a corresponding organization model, compensatory to the library-model of free self directed learning: We need a model which corresponds to the principle of free cooperation.

What does that mean and how can we materialize this principle? We could f.i. in our community organize a voluntary adult education cooperative system which mobilizes the experts in different subject- and professional areas to assist those fellow-citizen who want to get personally acquainted to the areas of those experts. This cooperative system also brings learners with simular interests in contact with one another.

Let me give you a pracitcal example:
If I go to a local Continuing Education Cooperative Center, organized according to the library model and to the principle of voluntary cooperation, I'll find adult education advisors or brokers there who have an information system available which allows them to tell me who else in this community has simular learning aims, interests and learning problems etc., whether there is perhaps already a group of learners dealing with the same subject, topics etc.

I can then get their addresses and telephone numbers and the idea is that everybody shares his or her knowledge, experience and ideas with others who have similar interests and look for contact, communication and cooperative support in their learning process.

And from the local adult education information system I can also get addresses and telephone numbers of relevant experts who feel the responsibility to voluntarily share their special knowledge and experience with interested fellow-citizen.

The modern electronic information technology might help to make this mutual information easier available for everybody who is interested in this voluntary cooperation.

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But everybody should have a chance to get acquainted with the feeling of social responsibility for others, which bares and penetrates this whole Adult Education Cooperative System. Thus the idea of the necessary responsible use of personal freedom can be domonstrated and promoted within the field of adult education.

This combination of an open library model with a voluntary cooperative system of adult education could be a convincing alternative of the free world to the authoritarian compulsory cooperation and indoctrination in ideologically closed unfree socialistic systems of adult education.

But now allow me still a few words about our second world-wide challenge for adult education: The tension between growing Specialization and increasing necessity to develop entire human persons with balanced physical, mental, rational, emotional needs and potentials.

According to our humanistic traditions education refers to the development of the whole range of human possibilities, so it should not only favor single parts or traits of a human person. We need well-balanced totalities with different abilities because this broader personal development seems to be a prerequisite for a well-balanced personal and social identity and for an adequate humane mastering of an unknown future. This is by the way, what we understand when we speak of "Human resource development": the broad development of the whole range of abilities of an individual - not the training for a special job.

But we all know that in a more and more rationalized and funcionalized world which seems to be progressively determined by modern science and technology adult persons also need more and more special knowledge and training which help them to be effective in their job and to effectively use the new High Tech. And this could mean that their creative potentials in art, music, handicrafts, languages,

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philosophy etc. can get more and more irrelevant for the improvement of their professional and economic situation.

There seems to be no escape from specialized training for specialized jobs, this specialization seems to be an unavoidable consequence of modern sciences and technologies which are based on specialized approaches to the complexity of nature and society. It seems to be the basic principle of modern science to reduce manyfold complexities to single chains of connections between causes and results, these chains which we call the laws of nature are artificially forced out of the complexity of natural reality. And this concentration on single separate causalities is the precondition for modern technic because this technic is based on the use of those special causalities to make the forces of nature available in order to make human life easier and more comfortable.

Nowaday we begin to see the prize we have to pay for this technical exploitation of nature: Our natural surroundings get more and more spoiled and displaced by the technical second hand world of modern civilization.

And we also get aware of possible psychic prizes for our technical progress: The world of modern technology corresponds to a special mentality which wants to make everything calculable, manageable, efficient, easily to be ruled and controlled by commands, given via buttons or lights. But this mentality which seems to be adequate to the technical world should not be transferred to interpersonal relations, to the world of art and culture, to politics and society, to philosophy and religion, to human feeling, understanding, longing, judging, behaving - to this whole world of humanity which cannot be divided and classified according to the categories right or wrong, yes or no, efficient or useless.

: That means our modern technical, computerized civilization favors a mentality which is not adequate to really understand the complex structures and needs of nature, humanity and society. It

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obviously neglects all the undeniable irrational parts of human life.

So we are here again confronted with a dialectic situation and with the task to combine two opposite principles:
We have to develop the skills and abilities which enable us to govern modern technics but we also have to develop a deeper understanding of the limited value of this world of modern technics and the limited value of the corresponding human talents and mentalities, limited

- in relation to the complex whole of human person,
- in comparison to the wider horizon of human talents, needs, interests and possibilities, and
- in confrontation with the deeper cultural and religious foundations of a meaningful human life.

Which organizational model for adult education could be an adequate answer to this challenge?

You remember: The first challenge of promoting personal freedom and variety as well as social responsibility and a spirit of voluntary cooperation made it necessary to realize and combine 2 models: the library model and the cooperation model.

Now the second challenge of promoting specialized abilities as well as the whole human person also leads to two organizational models and their combination:
I call them the "Specialization - Plus"-Model and the "Interdisciplinery Project"-Model.

"Specialization-Plus" means a combination of specialized instruction and training f.i. in the computer languages, the technics of programming etc. plus the promotion of a critical awareness of the limited value of this special approach for the solution of other fundamental problems of mankind.
In other words: practical specialized training plus inquiring reflections on its relative value and critical discussions on its general meaning.

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The other model, the Interdisciplinery Project Model, tries to involve adult learners in broad many-sided endeavors to solve a problem or to settle a task, to produce something meaningful. It is a new version of the old principle "learning by doing" - the doing being mostly a sort of broad interdisciplinary investigation.

In contrast to a specialising division of labor, these interdisciplinery projects force everybody to use as many talents as possible in as many different activities as possible.

Everybody should f.i. be involved in
- the planning,
- the discussion of different strategies and methods,
- the experimental proofs of varied possibilities,
- the evaluation of different approaches,
- the development of the necessary public relations,
- the promotion of a creative cooperative atmosphere etc.

Let me give you an example for this interdisciplinary project model: I once went with a group of 20 interested people to a little town in the Black Forest to study the overall situation of the people in this town. Every participant of our learners group had to take part in many different searching activities during this project, f.i.:

We tried to get a clear picture of
- the jobs, the spare time activities and hobbies,
- the dwelling and housing situation,
- the size and structure of the families,
- the traffic problems,
- the natural resources, the agriculture, the gardening, the different fruits and crops, the soil, the climate, the raining, the manure,
- the supply with water, energy, food, different articles of consumption,
- the political opinions, attitudes, parties, discussions, the

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work and the problems of the mayor and the city council, the budget and the tax problems,
- the industy, the situation of the different handicrafts and trades,
- the religious life, the different denominations, clubs, associations, cultural activities,
- the problems of the pollution of water, air and soil,
- the situation of the hotels, restaurants, cafés, discos, bars,
- the coming and going of visitors, travellers, people undergoing a cure,
- the educational needs and possibilities,
- the history of the town as far as it can be reconstructed from the tales of older people, from historic documents in the parish, old monuments in the churchyard, local finds in the museum etc.

The participants of this really interdisciplinery project met regularly in order to report about their results and to discuss the further tasks and strategies. We had agreed on the principle that everybody had to go into as many different activities as was possible; this implied a sort of regular rotation to other fields of work and research.

When we had finished our project we unanimously had the feeling that we had passed a very intensive and fruitful period of general education. The participants had practically to deal (more or less) with politics, economy, history, sociology, psychology, biology, agriculture, chemistry, geography, archeology, religion, education - and all had to develop their talents in activities like inquiring, discussing, convincing, arguing, planning, organizing, reporting - they learned cooperation, indepepdance, conscientiousness, discipline, engagement, perseverance and human understanding and sensitiveness.
Not only our memory was trained as in theoretical school learning, this project work challenged many intellectual, emotional, social, practical abilities.

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It was the idea behind this project-model to make the participants generally more able, mature and secure for their future life by using as many talents as possible in order to answer the manyfold challenges of an interdisciplinary project. We finally even published the results of our project which gave again opportunities for literary, editorial and managing activities.

This example shall stand for projects which are compensatory to the onesided development of technical abilities - in the context of a combined adult education model which comprises
- specialized instruction plus reflections on its limitations and
- compensatory multiple-challenge learning projects.

Let me finally underline again that Adult Education has to find convincing answers to the fundamental common problems which challenge mankind at the end of our century. I could only pick out here two of these challenges - two important ones I think which force us to concentrate on strategies to promote
- free personal initiatives as well as social responsibility and
- special abilities as well as a broad general human development.

The adult education models I derived from these tasks - the library model, the cooperation model, the specialization-Plus-model and the interdisciplinery project model - are certainly not the summit of educational wisdom. They are only small touching steps and we'll have to accumulate all these small steps which are done throughout the world and we have to unite our efforts in a free, open-minded international cooperation.

And this might then also improve our last chance if we once ask Saint Peter to come into heavens department for good educators.

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